

Eucharistic Communion as a Christian Contribution to Society*

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Introduction

THE EUCHARIST has an impact on human sociality. That at least applies to the life of the Church, as it is expressed in the famous expression “The Eucharist Makes the Church,” developed in the theology of the twentieth century, for example, by Fr. Ciappi in the 1952 Eucharistic Congress of Bogota¹ and in 1953 by Fr. de Lubac’s *Méditation sur l’Eglise*.² In the same vein, chapter 2 of John Paul II’s encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* is titled “The Eucharist builds the Church” (*Ecclesiam aedificat Eucharistia*). But another question would be: Can the Eucharist contribute to the life of a contemporary secular state? One way of giving a positive answer would be to reduce the Eucharist to a merely human dimension:

Every Sunday, I went to Mass. Sir, I have never been a believer. But couldn’t one say that the true mystery of Mass, it is communion among human beings! . . . Sir, how much did I like these Masses. Still now,

* Text from a conference at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary, Emmitsburg, Maryland, October 27, 2005.

¹ Cf. A.M. Ciappi, OP, “Eucharistia: Sacramentum unitatis Ecclesiae apud D. Thomam et posteriores theologos OP,” in *La Eucaristía y la Paz*, XXV Congreso eucarístico internacional 1952, Sesiones de estudio, t.1, (Barcelona, 1953), 282–86. Quoted after Gilles Emery, OP, “Le fruit ecclésial de l’eucharistie chez saint Thomas d’Aquin,” *Nova et Vetera* LXXII/4, 1997, 20–25 [25]. See Emery’s article for further discussion of the question of the ecclesial effect of the Eucharist according to St. Thomas.

² Cf. H. de Lubac, SJ, *Méditation sur l’Eglise* (Paris: Aubier, 1953), 113 and 129.

remembering them, I sometimes go to church, on Sunday mornings. We have, at St. Cecilia, a remarkable organist.³

Such a merely human understanding of the Eucharist is not theologically satisfying, for at least two reasons:

1. Believers do not perceive the Eucharist only at an aesthetic or social level, but first of all at the level of communion with God;
2. If the Eucharist is not communion with God, people who would attend it for social reasons only (such as family customs . . .) would soon lose any interest in it or even reject it.

The questions arise again: If the gifts of the Eucharist are spiritual, can they be applied to a contemporary state? For that to be possible, must the state be identified with the Church, as it was somehow in the Middle Ages? Contemporary Christians have accepted that the kind of union expressed in medieval Christianity is not the only possible model. This was expressed for instance by future Cardinal Charles Journet during World War II:

The concrete form of State which Christian Medieval society was looking for, not only would not be possible any more, it would not be good; it would be harmful for a society where Jews, Muslims, Protestants, Catholics, believers and atheists live side by side.⁴

If a Christian contribution to a contemporary state is possible, it must be a new one:

The new Christian political ideal will have to present itself as solving in a new way the great problems. . . . To all these problems, we must give new answers, that would be neither the liberal answer nor the communist answer. At the same time, it will be necessary that politicians whose

³ "Tous les dimanches, j'allais à la messe. Monsieur, je n'ai jamais été croyant. Mais ne pourrait-on pas dire que le vrai mystère de la messe, c'est la communion entre les hommes! . . . Ah! monsieur, comme j'ai pu aimer ces messes. A présent encore, en souvenir d'elles, je vais quelquefois à l'église, le dimanche matin. Nous avons, à Sainte-Cécile, un organiste remarquable." Jean-Paul Sartre, *La nausée*, "Le Livre de poche," (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 63, my translation.

⁴ "Le régime concret vers lequel tendait la société chrétienne du Moyen-Âge, non seulement ne serait plus possible, il ne serait pas bon, il serait néfaste pour une société où vivent, côte à côte, juifs, mahométans, protestants, catholiques, croyants, athées" (Charles Journet, *Exigences chrétiennes en politique* [Saint-Maurice: Editions Saint-Augustin, 1945, 1990], 38, my translation). The texts of these books have been published in several articles of *Nova et Vetera* during the war.

faith will be pure, deep, heroic, gifted with genius, capable to create new political techniques, put themselves to work in several countries together, because what must be politically renewed is the face of the world, not an isolated country, be it big or small. If that happens, and one must not say it to be impossible, we will see flourish soon, not the Christian Middle Ages, but a new Christian age.⁵

Although some preliminary texts suggested to ask for religious freedom only in countries where the Catholics were a minority, Vatican II fully endorsed the right for all religions to act freely even where one of them (which could be the Catholic one) would be the official religion:

If, in view of peculiar circumstances obtaining among peoples, special civil recognition is given to one religious community in the constitutional order of society, it is at the same time imperative that the right of all citizens and religious communities to religious freedom should be recognized and made effective in practice.⁶

I will now try to find out how the specific gifts of the Eucharist, that is, spiritual gifts that require Catholic faith, can be useful to a state that is not united to the Church and where many citizens are not Catholic. In the first place, I will try to highlight the effects of the Eucharist, following St. Thomas Aquinas. Then I will try to show how these gifts can play a role in political life, and for that I will use mainly John Paul II's last encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*.

Effects of the Eucharist according to St. Thomas Aquinas

For St. Thomas Aquinas, the Eucharist

- gives Eternal Life through the Passion (cf. *ST* III, q. 79, aa. 1–2);
- therefore forgives sins, although in the case of conscious mortal sins penance is required (cf. *ST* III, q. 79, aa. 3–4);

⁵ “Le nouvel idéal politique chrétien devra se présenter comme résolvant d’une manière nouvelle les grands problèmes. . . . A tous ces problèmes, il faut donner des réponses neuves, qui ne soient ni la réponse du libéralisme, ni la réponse du communisme. En même temps, il faudra que des hommes politiques dont la foi sera pure, profonde, héroïque, doués de génie, capables de créer de nouvelles techniques politiques, se mettent à l’oeuvre dans plusieurs pays à la fois, car c’est la face du monde qu’il faut renouveler politiquement, non un pays isolé, grand ou petit. Si cela se réalise, et il ne faut pas dire que cela est irréalisable, nous verrons reflourir sans trop attendre, non pas le moyen âge chrétien, mais un nouvel âge chrétien.” Charles Journet, *Exigences chrétiennes en politique*, 23.

⁶ Vatican Council II, Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 6. Cf. also idem, Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 36.

- feeds and strengthens (cf. *ST* III, q. 79, a. 1; q. 65, a. 1);
- preserves from future sins by strengthening the one who receives it and by repelling demons (cf. *ST* III, q. 79, a. 6);
- creates a community in charity, cf. *ST* III, q. 79, a. 1 quoting Augustine, “‘out of many grains is one thing made,’ namely, bread, ‘and many grapes flow into one thing,’ namely, wine. And therefore he observes elsewhere (*Tract. xxvi in Joan.*), ‘O sacrament of piety, O sign of unity, O bond of charity!’” and therefore creates the Mystical Body, cf. *ST* III, q. 73, a. 3, “the reality of the sacrament is the unity of the mystical body [res sacramenti est unitas corporis mystici], without which there can be no salvation”;
- manifests that unity, cf. *ST* III, q. 80, a. 4, “whoever receives this sacrament, expresses thereby that he is made one with Christ, and incorporated in His members”;
- completes the action of baptism, cf. *ST* III, q. 73, a. 3,

[B]y Baptism a man is ordained to the Eucharist, and therefore from the fact of children being baptized, they are destined by the Church to the Eucharist; and just as they believe through the Church’s faith, so they desire the Eucharist through the Church’s intention, and, as a result, receive its reality. But they are not disposed for Baptism by any previous sacrament, and consequently before receiving Baptism, in no way have they Baptism in desire; but adults alone have: consequently, they cannot have the reality of the sacrament without receiving the sacrament itself.

- All effects are summarized in grace, cf. *ST* III, q. 79, a. 1, “since Christ and His Passion are the cause of grace, and since spiritual refreshment, and charity cannot be without grace, it is clear from all that has been set forth that this sacrament bestows grace.”
- All these gifts presuppose that the Eucharist gives the Holy Spirit, cf. *ST* III, q. 63, a. 3, ad 1:

The Apostle speaks there of that sealing by which a man is assigned to future glory, and which is effected by grace. Now grace is attributed to the Holy Ghost, inasmuch as it is through love that God gives us something gratis, which is the very nature of grace: while the Holy Ghost is love.

The grace given by the Eucharist builds a community and prevents divisions by providing charity, reconciliation, and strength against sins. We can try to see how such gifts provided to the Catholic faithful can have an impact on the state where they live among other citizens.

Unity

God wants the whole of humanity to be united to him, which implies as a consequence a unity of men among themselves. This central asset of Christian faith must have some impact on the life of states, meanwhile for example, a predominantly national religion (such as Hinduism or Shinto) would be able to play such a role only within its range. And the Eucharist will have to be understood in connection to the unifying purpose of God in Christ.

The Second Vatican Council teaches that God has a unifying purpose, which is achieved by Jesus Christ in his Body, which is the Church: “[T]he Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”⁷ Among all actions of the Church, the most powerful is liturgy, as the same Council says:

Every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree.⁸

From the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their end, is achieved in the most efficacious possible way.⁹

John Paul II follows strictly the line of the Council:

By its union with Christ, the People of the New Covenant, far from closing in upon itself, becomes a “sacrament” for humanity, a sign and instrument of the salvation achieved by Christ, the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt 5:13–16), for the redemption of all. The Church’s mission stands in continuity with the mission of Christ: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (Jn 20:21). From the perpetuation of the sacrifice of the Cross and her communion with the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, the Church draws the spiritual power needed to carry out her mission. The Eucharist thus appears as both *the source* and the *summit* of all evangelization, since its goal is the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

⁷ Vatican Council II, Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

⁸ Vatican Council II, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 10.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 22.

The unity achieved by the Eucharist fulfils human desires of fraternity:

The gift of Christ and his Spirit which we receive in Eucharistic communion superabundantly fulfils the yearning for fraternal unity deeply rooted in the human heart; at the same time it elevates the experience of fraternity already present in our common sharing at the same Eucharistic table to a degree which far surpasses that of the simple human experience of sharing a meal. . . . The seeds of disunity, which daily experience shows to be so deeply rooted in humanity as a result of sin, are countered by *the unifying power* of the body of Christ. The Eucharist, precisely by building up the Church, creates human community.¹¹

To create a community is so central to the Eucharist that it is commonly called “communion”:

The Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1985 saw in the concept of an “ecclesiology of communion” the central and fundamental idea of the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The Church is called during her earthly pilgrimage to maintain and promote communion with the Triune God and communion among the faithful. For this purpose she possesses the word and the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, by which she “constantly lives and grows” and in which she expresses her very nature. It is not by chance that the term *communion* has become one of the names given to this sublime sacrament.¹²

The community built by the Eucharist is not only a community here and now, a community of this world and of this time. First of all, the Eucharist is always in continuity with the Apostles and the Church through the centuries before us:

The Eucharist too has its foundation in the Apostles, not in the sense that it did not originate in Christ himself, but because it was entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles and has been handed down to us by them and by their successors. It is in continuity with the practice of the Apostles, in obedience to the Lord’s command, that the Church has celebrated the Eucharist down the centuries.¹³

Every celebration of the Eucharist involves the Church of Heaven, which is both past (because the saints lived in this world before us) and future (the heavenly Jerusalem is the future of the present Church):

¹¹ Ibid., no. 24.

¹² Ibid., no. 34.

¹³ Ibid., no. 27.

It is not by chance that the Eastern Anaphoras and the Latin Eucharistic Prayers honor Mary, the ever-Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God, the angels, the holy apostles, the glorious martyrs and all the saints. This is an aspect of the Eucharist which merits greater attention: in celebrating the sacrifice of the Lamb, we are united to the heavenly "liturgy" and become part of that great multitude which cries out: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7:10). The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey.¹⁴

As G. K. Chesterton noted, the Church has the broadest sense of democracy, because she involves people of the past in her present life and decisionmaking:

I have never been able to understand where people got the idea that democracy was in some way opposed to tradition. It is obvious that tradition is only democracy extended through time. . . . Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death.¹⁵

The constant mention of our holy ancestors at Mass, as well as its traditional structure, make present to people's minds that the world is much broader and deeper than the surface of history.

The Eucharist builds the unity of the Church. By doing so, it helps society, and that help is not somehow parallel to the work of the Eucharist in the Church: The Eucharist can create the human community because it builds up the Church, a divine communion that is the divinely chosen sacrament of unity for the whole universe. As the Church does not have any "instrument" more powerful than the Eucharist for her mission of unifying the universe, the Eucharist is her main contribution to the life of the world. The community involved in the Eucharist is not only human and not only present. Being first of all a community with God, it can involve the faithful of the past who are already the Church of Heaven, the community of our future, together with the angels: Such an understanding of the community could help a more global political perspective, taking into consideration two aspects:

¹⁴ Ibid., no. 19.

¹⁵ Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (London: Sheed and Ward, Unicorn Books, 1939), 69–70.

1. Is it reasonable to exclude the possibility of a life after death from political perspectives?
2. The continuity with persons of the past does not have to be only institutional, it can also be a living communion.

Sacrifice and Eternal Life

The Eucharist is a sacrifice in which the unique sacrifice of Christ is made present and the faithful are called to be united to that sacrifice:

In giving his sacrifice to the Church, Christ has also made his own the spiritual sacrifice of the Church, which is called to offer herself in union with the sacrifice of Christ. This is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council concerning all the faithful: "Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the source and summit of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine victim to God, and offer themselves along with it."¹⁶

Some fundamental texts of the New Testament explain the importance of the sacrifice:

I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. (Rom 12:1)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. (1 Jn 3:16)

Future Cardinal Journet, in his reflections on the situation of the Church in a contemporary state, mentioned as essential the sacrificial dimension:

The Church as such, Christianity, does not take up arms: "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18:36). Like Christ whose Body she is, the Church is not made to shed other people's blood, but to give her own. With which weapons is she sent to the world? "I am sending you out like lambs among wolves" (Lk 10:3). And the miracle is that after two thousand years she still subsists.¹⁷

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 13, quoting *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.

¹⁷ "L'Eglise comme telle, le christianisme, ne prend pas les armes: 'Mon royaume n'est pas de ce monde . . .' (Jn 18:36). A l'instar du Christ dont elle est le corps, l'Eglise n'est pas faite pour verser le sang des autres, mais pour donner le sien. Avec quelles armes est-elle envoyée au monde? 'Voici que je vous envoie comme des agneaux au milieu des loups.' (Lc 10:3) Et le miracle est qu'après deux mille ans elle subsiste encore." Charles Journet, *Exigences chrétiennes en politique*, 89–90.

It is hardly necessary to say that a society needs its citizens to care for the common good. Given the fact that we must sometimes choose between our immediate personal good and common good, some sacrifice is required for the sake of the broader community. Citizens who celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice and find their life in it are stimulated to some sacrifice, and receive grace to make it possible.

A few years before Vatican II, Archbishop Giovanni Battista Montini of Milan—future Pope Paul VI—insisted that the Eucharist would be the answer to desires of unity within the deep social and ideological divisions of his diocese, and that this is possible thanks to some sacrificial concern for the common good:

If a principle generator of sociability is higher and more disengaged from contingent and particular interests, if it is more established on spontaneity and on love's generosity . . . , in that measure it is more able to attract from all sides and to conciliate together, freely, adherents from different origins and different feelings, if at least they welcome it sincerely and accept to be unified by such a principle in the superior convergence of ideas and norms that it proposes. Such a principle is religion, it is faith; our Catholic faith, that has the genius of unity in freedom, and of universality in the respect of the individual person and of honest individual expressions of human activity. And this principle is best verified in the Eucharist, which we celebrate so that the grace of Christian fraternity would give civil and sacred consistency to our People, would engender in it customs of mutual respect and positive concord, would resolve the deep ideological contrasts that still divide and threaten it, so that it would give [to our people] vigor and splendor of interior coherence and conscience of balanced and increasing justice.¹⁸

¹⁸ "Quanto più un principio generatore di socialità è alto e disimpegnato da interessi contingenti e particolari, quanto più esso si fonda su la spontaneità e la generosità dell'amore, . . . tanto più possiede virtù di attrarre da ogni parte e di conciliare insieme, liberamente, aderenti di diversa origine e di diverso sentire, purché essi lo accolgano sinceramente ed accettino d'essere da tale principio unificati nella superiore convergenza di idee e di norme ch'esso propone. Questo principio è la religione, è la fede; la nostra fede cattolica, che ha il genio dell'unità nella libertà, e della universalità nel rispetto della singola persona e delle singole oneste espressioni dell'attività umana. E questo principio è massimamente invero nell'Eucaristia, che qui celebriamo, proprio affinché la grazia della fratellanza cristiana dia civile e sacra consistenza al nostro popolo, generi in esso costume di mutuo rispetto e di positiva concordia, risolva i profondi contrasti ideologici, che ancora lo dividono e lo minacciano, gli conferisca vigore e splendore di interiore coerenza, e coscienza di equilibrata e progredente giustizia" (Giovanni Battista Montini, "Discorso al termine della processione del Corpus Domini, Piazza del Duomo," Milano, 5 June 1958, in idem, *Discorsi e scritti milanesi* [1954–1963], vol. 2 [Brescia/Roma: Istituto

This appears even more in the light of the gift of eternal life in the Eucharist, because sacrifice is obviously made easier by the perspective of a life after death. In the Eucharist we receive not only a promise of eternal life, but eternal life itself, in the inchoative form it has in this life:

Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life: *they already possess it on earth*, as the first-fruits of a future fullness which will embrace man in his totality. For in the Eucharist we also receive the pledge of our bodily resurrection at the end of the world: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6:54).¹⁹

Eternal life and hope to have it fully after our resurrection have an impact on our action also at the social level:

A significant consequence of the eschatological tension inherent in the Eucharist is also the fact that it spurs us on our journey through history and plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us. Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of "new heavens" and "a new earth" (Rev 21:1), but this increases, rather than lessens, *our sense of responsibility for the world today*. I wish to reaffirm this forcefully at the beginning of the new millennium, so that Christians will feel more obliged than ever not to neglect their duties as citizens in this world. Theirs is the task of contributing with the light of the Gospel to the building of a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan. . . . Proclaiming the death of the Lord "until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26) entails that all who take part in the Eucharist be committed to changing their lives and making them in a certain way completely "Eucharistic." It is this fruit of a transfigured existence and a commitment to transforming the world in accordance with the Gospel which splendidly illustrates the eschatological tension inherent in the celebration of the Eucharist and in the Christian life as a whole: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).²⁰

An Italian militant atheist, Paolo Flores D'Arcais, at the end of an article where he explains his arguments against the existence of God, wishes believers and atheists to be able to work together for the sake of a better world. At this point, he mentions the specific difficulty that atheists have in that regard:

Paolo VI/Studium, 1997], 2183–84 [continuous pagination from vol. 1 to vol. 3], my translation). In the same line, cf. "Conferenza ad Ancona," May 17, 1957, vol. 1, 1403.

¹⁹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 20.

That common acting of believers and non-believers for the sake of equal dignity and justice . . . requires from the atheist something rather more difficult to deal with: the vicious circle for which to practice effective solidarity and the primacy of the “I” implies a duty to sacrifice oneself (so that the equal dignity would not remain rhetorical), that usually is achieved only when one has faith in another One (intended as God the Father). The stumbling stone for the Christian is the temptation to dictate laws (in the name of a supposed “natural law” that—happy chance—coincides always with the *ex cathedra* speech). The stumbling stone for the atheist is the incapacity of charity.²¹

One reason the communist project finally collapsed in the Soviet Union is precisely that difficulty of motivating people to the generous idea of giving part of the personal good—and sometimes life itself—for the state and for the beautiful future of others.

Quite opposite is the situation of Christians, and Tertullian used that argument against the persecutions of the late second century: “[N]o one considers what the loss is to the common weal, a loss as great as it is real, no one estimates the injury entailed upon the state, when, men of virtue as we are, we are put to death in such numbers.”²² Tertullian goes on to explain that the contribution of Christians is due to the link between this life and next life: “Taught of God himself what goodness is, we have both a perfect knowledge of it as revealed to us by a perfect Master; and faithfully we do His will, as enjoined on us by a Judge we dare not despise.”²³

The disciple who takes part in the memorial of the sacrifice of the Lord is stimulated to the union with that sacrifice. In the Eucharist, he receives the help required for that union to be effective. Above all, he receives eternal life, without which the sacrifice would be significantly more difficult. And one can easily see how such a capacity to sacrifice and moral life can help the service of the common good, indispensable for the state.

²¹ “Questo agire insieme—credenti e non-credenti—per l’eguale dignità e la giustizia . . . per l’ateo esige qualcosa di assai più difficile da affrontare: il circolo vizioso per cui praticare la solidarietà effettiva e il primato del tu implica un dovere di sacrificarsi (perché l’eguale dignità non resti retorica) che riesce in genere solo se si ha fede in un Altro (inteso proprio come Dio padre). La pietra d’inciampo per il cristiano è la tentazione di dettare legge (in nome di una presunta ‘legge naturale’ che coincide sempre, guarda caso, con la parola *ex cathedra*). La pietra d’inciampo per l’ateo è l’incapacità della carità” (Paolo Flores D’Arcais, “Dio esiste?” *MicroMega* 2 [2000]: 40, my translation).

²² Tertullian, *The Apology*, chapter XLIV, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 49.

²³ *Ibid.*, chapter XLV, 50.

Reconciliation and Remedy

Making present the act that reconciles the humanity with God, the Eucharist works for reconciliation within humanity:

The Church constantly draws her life from the redeeming sacrifice; she approaches it not only through faith-filled remembrance, but also through a real contact, since *this sacrifice is made present ever anew*, sacramentally perpetuated, in every community which offers it at the hands of the consecrated minister. The Eucharist thus applies to men and women today the reconciliation won once for all by Christ for mankind in every age.²⁴

This reconciliation, and the communion obtained through it, is also peace, and calls for peace:

The Eucharist *creates communion and fosters communion*. Saint Paul wrote to the faithful of Corinth explaining how their divisions, reflected in their Eucharistic gatherings, contradicted what they were celebrating, the Lord's Supper. The Apostle then urged them to reflect on the true reality of the Eucharist in order to return to the spirit of fraternal communion (cf. 1 Cor 11:17–34). Saint Augustine effectively echoed this call when, in recalling the Apostle's words: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12:27), he went on to say: "If you are his body and members of him, then you will find set on the Lord's table your own mystery. Yes, you receive your own mystery." And from this observation he concludes: "Christ the Lord . . . hallowed at his table the mystery of our peace and unity. Whoever receives the mystery of unity without preserving the bonds of peace receives not a mystery for his benefit but evidence against himself."²⁵

The sign of peace exchanged in some celebrations of Mass expresses this internal logic of the Eucharist: One cannot receive the Eucharist together with an enemy without looking for reconciliation. If somebody is not in peace with God or his neighbor, the Eucharist will push that person to the sacrament of reconciliation.²⁶ And the grace of the Eucharist helps us overcome our deficiencies, which is a condition for an

²⁴ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 40.

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 37: "The two sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance are very closely connected. Because the Eucharist makes present the redeeming sacrifice of the Cross, perpetuating it sacramentally, it naturally gives rise to a continuous need for conversion. . . . If a Christian's conscience is burdened by serious sin, then the path of penance through the sacrament of Reconciliation becomes necessary for full participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice."

active and durable reconciliation. Without this grace, even good intentions of reconciliation might be vain, because “were we to disregard the Eucharist, how could we overcome our own deficiency?”²⁷ As St. Ambrose of Milan said, it belongs to persons conscious of their deficiency to look for the remedy, and to receive the Eucharist:

If this bread is daily, why do you take it after one year as the Greeks in the East were accustomed to do? Receive daily what serves you daily. . . . You hear that every time the sacrifice is offered, the death of the Lord, the resurrection of the Lord, the elevation of the Lord is signified, with the remission of sins, and you do not take this daily bread of life? Who has a wound needs the medicine. The wound is that we are under sin, the heavenly medicine is the venerable sacrament.²⁸

What St. Ambrose says here is not valid only at the individual level. Any state needs its citizens to be in peace with themselves and among themselves. When it is not the case, all social services and police forces cannot compensate the inner root of peace. As Jesus said:

What comes out of a man is what makes him “unclean.” For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man “unclean.” (Mk 7:20–23)

The Eucharist heals the inner man, where all good and evil acts begin. Therefore it is a source of peace and of reconciliation in the world.

A Eucharistic Culture

Pope John Paul II repeated several times that the Eucharist builds a culture: “[T]he Eucharist offers sustenance not only to individuals but to entire peoples, and it shapes cultures inspired by Christianity.”²⁹ This is true for instance at the artistic level: “[T]he Eucharist, while shaping the Church

²⁷ Ibid., no. 60.

²⁸ “Si quotidianus est panis, cur post annum illum sumas quemadmodum graeci in oriente faciunt consueverunt? Accipe quotidie quod quotidie tibi prosit. . . . Ergo tu audis quod quotiescumque offertur sacrificium, mors domini, resurrectio domini, eleuatio domini significetur et remissio peccatorum, et panem istum uitae non quotidianus adsumis? Qui uulnus habet medicinam requirit. Uulnus est quia sub peccato sumus, medicina est caelestis uenerabile sacramentum” Ambrose of Milan, *De Sacramentis*, V, 25, Latin text taken from *Des sacrements, des mystères, Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. 25 (Paris: Cerf, 1950), 95–96, my translation.

²⁹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 51.

and her spirituality, has also powerfully affected ‘culture,’ and the arts in particular.”³⁰ A visit to any important museum would show how many pieces of fine arts have been directly liturgical. Obviously the churches themselves can be a good example of that. But the cultural impact of the Eucharist is not limited to these immediate links. The Eucharist changes the persons, and—as Pope John Paul also said—it can, for instance, promote a culture of persons who follow thankfully their servant Lord:

The “culture of the Eucharist” promotes a culture of dialogue, which here finds strength and nourishment. It is a mistake to think that any public reference to faith will somehow undermine the rightful autonomy of the State and civil institutions, or that it can even encourage attitudes of intolerance. If history demonstrates that mistakes have also been made in this area by believers, as I acknowledged on the occasion of the Jubilee, this must be attributed not to “Christian roots,” but to the failure of Christians to be faithful to those roots. One who learns to say “thank you” in the manner of the crucified Christ might end up as a martyr, but never as a persecutor.³¹

The Eucharist has an impact on culture also by setting correctly the kind of relationship between divine and human elements in religion. A complete culture should certainly not exclude from its perspective at least the possibility of the divine, without which many aspects of human life become so incomprehensible that humanity seems absurd, unable to live without an absolute but unable to attain it. Still, history shows well that to set the right balance in the connection between divine and human realities is no easy task, and that mistakes at this level have huge consequences. A confusion of divine and human (pantheism) empties human life, and too strong a separation leaves man alone, threatening in the long term his dignity.

The mere fact that God himself, the only God, omnipotent, Creator of the whole Universe, can be really present under the species of bread and wine, on top of that thanks to the action of a man (the priest), shows both the importance of creation and the presence of an infinite mystery. To hold these aspects together is an essential and typical contribution of Catholic culture.

Why is that typically Catholic (and also Orthodox)? Because the Protestant mindset always struggled with too strong a link between God and matter. This applies both to the role of the priest and to the real presence in the Eucharist.

³⁰ Ibid., no. 49.

³¹ John Paul II, apostolic letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, October 7, 2004, no. 26.

When all communions who belong to the Commission of Faith and Order (World Council of Churches) had to reply officially to the document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*³² in the 1980s, several answers expressed a fear regarding the role attributed to the ministers in the liturgy (in the line of Catholic theology speaking about the priest acting *in persona Christi*).³³ An argument that repeatedly appears in these Protestant answers insists on the divine action as exclusive:

The preservation of the gospel does not depend on a certain structure, and that the Holy Spirit has often taken unusual measures when admonishing the church. It is necessary to keep in mind that the life of the church is entirely dependent on God and his initiative.³⁴

Since Lutheran doctrine differentiates very carefully and concretely between the authority of the Lord who is himself present in the Supper and the authority of the ordained minister whom he authorizes to act, we cannot possibly make the validity of a celebration of the Lord's Supper depend on its being conducted by an ordained minister, even though, in practice, in the interests of "due" order, we take great care to ensure that this is the case.³⁵

The church and its ministries are never in themselves dispensers or sole purveyors of grace. Every activity of the church and ministries has to be simply a means for the clear discernment of an activity which is God's alone.³⁶

As regard apostolic succession, we consider that it should not be tied to human persons because the gifts of God are not tied to human beings.³⁷

Behind the mindset expressed in these answers, one that some Protestant theologians try to overcome,³⁸ there is a broader question, which is the

³² World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order paper no. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982). The answers were published in Max Thurian, ed., *Churches Respond to Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches), vols. 1–2 (1986); vols. 3–4 (1987); vols. 5–6 (1988).

³³ Cf., for example, John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, nos. 29, 32, 52.

³⁴ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, in Thurian, *Churches Respond*, vol. 4, 67.

³⁵ North Elbian Evangelical Church, in Thurian, *Churches Respond*, vol. 1, 50.

³⁶ Standing Council of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of France, in Thurian, *Churches Respond*, vol. 3, 144.

³⁷ Presbyterian Church of Rwanda, in Thurian, *Churches Respond*, vol. 3, 184.

³⁸ Cf., for example, (writing before his conversion to the Catholic Church) R. R. Reno, "The Evangelical Significance for the Historic Episcopate," in *Inhabiting Unity: Theological Perspectives on the Proposal Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat*, eds. Ephraim Radner and R. R. Reno (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 90: "We ought to be careful, for the requirement of laying on of hands would seem to be

relationship between divine action and human action. Before the controversies of the sixteenth century, St. Thomas articulates such a question and offers an answer:

As then it is not absurd for the same action to be produced by an agent and the power of that agent, so neither is it absurd for the same effect to be produced by an inferior agent and by God, by both immediately, although in different manners. . . . When the same effect is attributed to a natural cause and to the divine power, it is not as though the effect were produced partly by God and partly by the natural agent: but the whole effect is produced by both, though in different ways, as the same effect is attributed wholly to the instrument, and wholly also to the principal agent.³⁹

In this view, there is no more need to oppose divine action in the sacraments to human actions than there would be to oppose God and the rosebush in the production of roses: The effect is totally from God, through the action of a creature that also totally produces the effect as a divinely chosen instrument.

Just as the question of the minister depends on a general metaphysical understanding, and not only on principles of sacramental theology, it also has an impact that is much broader than the sacramental field. The culture of the Eucharist teaches the importance of human actions because they have a consistency in themselves and can be used by God. Human life is therefore not divided in two different layers, but is unified. From that precise point arises an understanding of the whole Church. Not only, as John Paul II said, “the Eucharist offers sustenance not only to individuals,”⁴⁰ but it also actively associates the members of the Church to their salvation: Jesus Christ, author of the whole of salvation, does not want his disciples to be inactive, because if so he would undermine our humanity

exactly the sort of condition God chooses in Christ and for us. The scandalous worldly features of the tradition of apostolical succession, the physical act of laying on of hands, echoes the much more scandalously worldly and physical features of Christ's obedience. Further, if we chuckle at the notion that God might use a bishop's hands to ensure the survival of his people, then we may all too easily chuckle when the gospel places demands upon our hands—to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Will we not dodge these gospel imperatives with some self-serving line about how God does not establish conditions, does not call human hands into action to do his work? Far, then, from corrupting the evangelical purity of the gospel, the requirement of historical succession is an intensification of the penetrating power of the gospel.”

³⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, ch. 70.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 51.

instead of saving it. This is a point on which ecumenical dialogue must insist, in two different aspects:

1. The importance of the Church in our relation to God. Fr. Congar identified as one of the problems Catholics have with the Reformation the “elimination of the reality ‘Church’ as a constitutive element of the covenant relationship.”⁴¹ Of course, for instance, Calvin’s catechism insists on the necessity of the Church up to the point of saying that to refuse the Church “makes the death of Christ without effect. . . . For the one effect resulting from all is, that there is a Church.”⁴² Catholic theologians agree with Calvin on this point, but would ask what the consistency of the Church and of her acts can be.
2. Unity of human life. Luther divides life into two different Reigns, and therefore holds it necessary to say to a prince:

A prince can be a Christian, but he must not rule as a Christian; and according to his activity of ruling, he’s not called a Christian but a prince. . . . Because according to the fact that he’s a Christian, the Gospel teaches him that he must hurt nobody, neither punish nor speak, but forgive everybody and must suffer whatever painful or unjust happens to him. This is (I say), a Christian teaching, but it would not make a good government, if you would also preach it to the prince; but he must say: I leave my Christianity between God and me. . . . But over or next to it I also have in the world another status or office: that I am a prince.⁴³

Such a vision leads to secularization. Catholic principles, as expressed by the Eucharist, invite to a unity with God in all dimensions of human life.

⁴¹ Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 463.

⁴² Jean Calvin, *Le catéchisme de Genève*, En français moderne (Paris: Editions “Je sers,” 1934), 15e section, 43, (English: www.ondocrine.com/2cal0504.htm): “Q. Qu’est-ce que l’Eglise catholique? R. C’est la compagnie des fidèles, que Dieu a ordonnés et élus à la vie éternelle. Q. Est-il nécessaire de croire cet article? R. Oui, si nous ne voulons rendre la mort de Jésus-Christ infructueuse et tout ce qui en a été dit, inutile: car le fruit qui en procède, c’est l’Eglise.”

⁴³ *Wochenpredigten über Matt. 5–7*, 1530/2, Druck 1532, WA 32:440, my translation: “Ein Fürst kan wol ein Christ sein, aber als ein Christ mus er nicht regieren: und nach dem er regiret, heisst er nicht ein Christ sondern ein Fürst. . . . Denn nach dem er ein Christ ist, leret ihn das Euangelium das er nieman sol leid thun, nicht straffen noch reden, sondern idermann vergeben, und was im leid odder unrecht geschicht sol er leiden. Das ist (sag ich) eines Christen lectio, Aber das würde nicht ein gut regiment machen, wenn du dem Fürsten woltest also predigen, Sondern so mus er sagen: Meinem Christenstand lasse ich gehen zwischen

Whether human actions really play a role or not has a deep impact on anthropology and culture: Citizens who believe that human acts can have a “divine” impact and import to God himself will at least give some value to what they do in society.

Another aspect of the same question is the real presence of a divine Person in mere matter. John Calvin considered scandalous too strong a theology of real presence:

The presence of Christ in the Supper we must hold to be such as neither affixes him to the element of bread, nor encloses him in bread, nor circumscribes him in any way (this would obviously detract from his celestial glory); and it must, moreover, be such as neither divests him of his just dimensions, nor dissevers him by differences of place, nor assigns to him a body of boundless dimensions, diffused through heaven and earth. All these things are clearly repugnant to his true human nature. Let us never allow ourselves to lose sight of the two restrictions. First, Let there be nothing derogatory to the heavenly glory of Christ. This happens whenever he is brought under the corruptible elements of this world, or is affixed to any earthly creatures.⁴⁴

Calvin certainly addresses a mystery: How can God be seemingly limited to material elements? He solves the mystery by suppressing it. When he dealt with the same concern, Aquinas saw three reasons why God could act through the material elements of the sacraments. All these reasons affirm that God—who, of course, is not tied to matter nor to the sacraments—chooses a way of helping us that respects what we are:

Sacraments are necessary unto man’s salvation for three reasons. The first is taken from the condition of human nature which is such that it has to be led by things corporeal and sensible to things spiritual and intelligible. Now it belongs to Divine providence to provide for each one according as its condition requires. Divine wisdom, therefore, fittingly provides man with means of salvation, in the shape of corporeal and sensible signs that are called sacraments. The second reason is taken from the state of man who in sinning subjected himself by his affections to corporeal things. Now the healing remedy should be given to a man so as to reach the part affected by disease. Consequently it was fitting that God should provide man with a spiritual medicine by means of certain corporeal signs; for if man were offered spiritual things without a veil, his mind being taken up with the material world would be unable to apply itself to them. The third reason is taken from the fact that man is

Gott und mir. . . . Aber über odder neben dem habe ich inn der welt einen andern stand odder ampt: das ich ein Furst bin.”

⁴⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.XVII.19.

prone to direct his activity chiefly towards material things. Lest, therefore, it should be too hard for man to be drawn away entirely from bodily actions, bodily exercise was offered to him in the sacraments, by which he might be trained to avoid superstitious practices, consisting in the worship of demons, and all manner of harmful action, consisting in sinful deeds. It follows, therefore, that through the institution of the sacraments man, consistently with his nature, is instructed through sensible things; he is humbled, through confessing that he is subject to corporeal things, seeing that he receives assistance through them.⁴⁵

St. Thomas similarly says the following in a very condensed way about the Eucharist: "The Church's sacraments are ordained for helping man in the spiritual life. But the spiritual life is analogous to the corporeal, since corporeal things bear a resemblance to spiritual."⁴⁶ Here, as in the question of the importance of the sacramental ministry, one can see a global approach that cannot not have an impact on a whole culture: Because he loves us, God acts through elements of this world adapted to our nature. There is no place where we perceive more than in the Eucharist that our world can be transfigured by divine presence. In a culture of the real presence, the Eucharist is the real centre of the "village." Where such a centre has been suppressed, even the church looks like an empty building.

Out of that comes a whole understanding of life, which has been expressed by Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet of Meaux (1627–1704) in his polemical remarks about the Protestant understanding of the Eucharist:

The Church . . . as she considers without doubting the highest difficulties, proposes them without undue caution, sure to find in her sons a mind always ready to be captivated, and a docility always ready to carry the weight of divine secret. Heretics, who try to relieve the human sense and the animal part where the divine secret cannot enter, struggle to read Holy Scripture according to their mode. The Church meanwhile only tries to take Scripture with simplicity. She hears the

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 61, a. 1. Cf. also idem, *Summa contra Gentiles*, bk. IV, ch. 61: "Because spiritual effects are produced on the pattern of visible effects, it was fitting that our spiritual nourishment should be given us under the appearances of those things that men commonly use for their bodily nourishment, namely bread and wine. And for the further correspondence of spiritual signs with bodily effects, in the spiritual regeneration of Baptism the mystery of the Word Incarnate is united with us otherwise than as it is united in this Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is our spiritual nourishment. In Baptism the Word Incarnate is only virtually contained, but in the Sacrament of the Eucharist we confess Him to be contained substantially, as nourishment must be substantially united with the nourished."

⁴⁶ *ST* III, q. 73, a. 1.

Lord say "This is my body," and does not understand that what he so bluntly calls Body would be something else than the body itself.⁴⁷

The trouble when one does not show to the Eucharist the whole respect due to it, in simplicity, is that such an attitude then contaminates the whole understanding of things divine:

On the one hand Luther, knocked down by the power of these words, "This is my Body, this is my Blood," could not just abandon altogether the real presence; but at the same time he wanted to relieve the human sense by suppressing the changing of the substance. One did not just stay there, and soon the real presence was attacked. The human sense began finding these inventions tasty, and once it had been satisfied on one mystery, it required the same laxity on all others. As Zwingli and his followers pretended that real presence was in Lutheranism a remain of Papism which still had to be reformed, the Socinians said the same about the Trinity and the Incarnation, and these great mysteries which had been left intact for 1200 years joined the controversies of a century in which all novelties thought they had the right to happen.⁴⁸

What Bossuet suggests here is the dark side of a beautiful reality: People retrieve from their approach to the Eucharist a complete vision of life. If they accept the mystery of the Eucharist, they learn from it a sense of

⁴⁷ "L'Eglise . . . , comme elle envisage sans s'étonner les difficultés les plus hautes, elle les propose sans ménagement, assurée de trouver dans ses enfants un esprit toujours prêt à se captiver, et une docilité capable de tout le poids du secret divin. Les hérétiques qui cherchent à soulager le sens humain et la partie animale où le secret de Dieu ne peut entrer, se tourmentent à tourner l'Ecriture Sainte à leur mode. L'Eglise ne songe au contraire qu'à la prendre simplement. Elle entend dire au Sauveur, 'ceci est mon Corps', et ne comprend pas que ce qu'il appelle Corps si absolument soit autre chose que le corps même." Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, *Histoire des variations des Eglises protestantes*, 2 tomes, Chez la Veuve de Sébastien Mabre-Cramoisy (Paris: Imprimeur du Roy, 1688), t. II, L. XV, ch. CXXXVII, 626–27, my translation.

⁴⁸ "D'un autre côté le même Luther, abattu par la force de ces paroles, 'Ceci est mon Corps, Ceci est mon Sang', n'a pu se défaire de la présence réelle; mais en même temps il a voulu soulager le sens humain en ôtant le changement de substance. On n'en est pas demeuré là, et la présence réelle a été bientôt attaquée. Le sens humain a pris goût à ses inventions, et après qu'on l'a voulu contenter sur un mystère, il a demandé le même relâchement pour tous les autres. Comme Zwingli et ses sectateurs ont prétendu que la présence réelle était dans le Luthéranisme un reste du Papisme qu'il fallait encore réformer, les Sociniens en ont dit autant de la Trinité et de l'Incarnation; et ces grands mystères qui n'avaient reçu aucune atteinte depuis douze cents ans, sont entrés dans les controverses d'un siècle où toutes les nouveautés ont cru avoir droit de se produire." Bossuet, *Histoire des variations des Eglises protestantes*, t. II, L. XV, ch. CXXII, 611.

humility and gratitude for a God who acts wonders in realities typical of every day's life. That sense of the mystery, that sense of humility and gratitude can impregnate all fields of life.

Eucharist and Divided Christians Within the Same State

Certainly, the sacrament of baptism grants life, reconciles with God, establishes unity among all the baptized. It could even seem that there is more unity in baptism than in the Eucharist, at least in countries where significant Protestant and Catholic communities live together. The first president of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, Cardinal Bea, said just after Vatican II: "It would appear to us that the Eucharist is, in the light of ecumenism, above all a symbol of the lost unity of Christians."⁴⁹ As the Eucharist declares and shows in the most solemn way the unity of the Church, absence of unity in the Eucharist is also a problem for the state: Therefore in the past many states tried to impose some kind of liturgical unity; the foundation of the United States is in part due to such politics in Britain. Wouldn't it be wiser then to stress baptismal unity rather than Eucharistic unity?

That would not be coherent because, as St. Thomas Aquinas said, "by Baptism a man is ordained to the Eucharist."⁵⁰ Vatican II's *Decree on Ecumenism* also says:

Baptism therefore establishes a sacramental bond of unity which links all who have been reborn by it. But of itself Baptism is only a beginning, an inauguration wholly directed toward the fullness of life in Christ. Baptism, therefore, envisages a complete profession of faith, complete incorporation in the system of salvation such as Christ willed it to be, and finally complete ingrafting in Eucharistic communion.

Though the ecclesial Communities which are separated from us lack the fullness of unity with us flowing from Baptism, and though we believe they have not retained the proper reality of the Eucharistic mystery in its fullness, especially because of the absence of the sacrament of Orders, nevertheless when they commemorate His death and resurrection in the Lord's Supper, they profess that it signifies life in communion with Christ and look forward to His coming in glory.⁵¹

Certainly, the division of Christians is good neither for the Church nor for the state. But should we therefore insist only on the unity established

⁴⁹ Augustine Cardinal Bea, *The Way to Unity after the Council* (London: Deacon Books, Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), 150.

⁵⁰ ST III, q. 73, a. 3.

⁵¹ Vatican Council II, decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 22.

by baptism, by common faith in Christ, by a common acceptance of Scripture? Of course the internal logic of such an argument would imply not to insist on any kind of religious element, since there are also believers of other religions and atheists. But Catholics have their own contribution, received from Christ himself, and must trust the goodness of the highest divine gifts. If Vatican II confesses that “from the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us,”⁵² we can say to our Protestant brethren that the importance that divine grace has in their theology is for us a good reason to insist on the fullness of the Eucharist. We could say about the Eucharist what Pope Paul VI wrote in his first encyclical about his ministry, which is also sign of unity and division at the same time:

Are there not those who say that unity between the separated Churches and the Catholic Church would be more easily achieved if the primacy of the Roman pontiff were done away with? We beg our separated brothers to consider the groundlessness of this opinion. Take away the sovereign Pontiff and the Catholic Church would no longer be catholic. Moreover, without the supreme, effective, and authoritative pastoral office of Peter the unity of Christ's Church would collapse. It would be vain to look for other principles of unity in place of the true one established by Christ Himself.⁵³

Even before his pontificate, Montini had already noticed that quite generally what unites Christians is also what divides them: “If one looks carefully at these relations, he will notice a strange phenomenon. What should constitute the basis of unity—thought, doctrine, common faith—instead of being an argument of union is a stumbling stone, an obstacle to unity. Faith divides us.”⁵⁴ Christ himself did not stop at the consideration that he himself, his acts and his words, could divide, and neither did his disciples:

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. . . .” On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a

⁵² Vatican Council II, constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 10.

⁵³ Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam* (August 6, 1964), no. 110.

⁵⁴ “Se si esaminano a fondo questi rapporti, ci si accorge di un fenomeno strano. Ciò che dovrebbe costituire la base dell'unione—il pensiero, la dottrina, la fede comune—invece di essere argomento di unione è inciampo, ostacolo all'unità. La fede ci divide.” Giovanni Battista Montini, “Conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity,” Santuario di S. Antonio Abate, Milan, January 25, 1963, in idem, *Discorsi e scritti milanesi*, vol. 3, 5538, my translation.

hard teaching. Who can accept it?" . . . From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (Jn 6:53–69)

The Eucharist is also a decisive principle of unity wanted by Christ. Even from the point of view of state—although indirectly—one can say about the Eucharist what Paul VI said about his ministry: If we take away that divine gift, how do we substitute for it? In other words, "To whom shall we go" if we do not find Christ where he comes?

A Catholic contribution to a state, which is not composed only of Catholics, is to follow the Lord who has the words of eternal life for all, to receive thankfully his highest gifts, which from the Church help all. If these gifts are at the same time a sign of division, the respect Catholics show to other citizens and to their freedom has the potential of highlighting above all unity.

Conclusion

By the very fact that it unifies the Church, the Eucharist contributes to the unity of the whole world and of any state. In the Eucharist, the saving sacrifice of Christ is made present and grants grace; believers who consciously participate in this sacrifice are stimulated to the sacrifice of their own life, which is then a contribution to the common good of the society in which they live. This contribution is made easier by the perspective of eternal life, without which people are naturally eager to keep their present life. There are some personal, local, and rather endemic conflicts in all societies: One solution to them is of course to contain them thanks to police resources, prisons, social services, and so forth. But the most peaceful and efficient solution is reconciliation, and the Eucharist brings to the world reconciliation from God, with God, and therefore among human beings. The Eucharist builds a culture thanks to the kind of relationship it presupposes between God and the created world: God can use matter and human beings for his own presence and action; out of that comes a renewed vision of the whole world. Even if the Eucharist is not celebrated by many citizens of a given state, and not even by all Christian citizens, it is not as such a sign of division within a country, but the highest contribution to unity and peace that Catholics can provide.

In the first year of his pontificate, during the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI celebrated the Mass of the Holy Thursday in his cathedral, St. John of Lateran. We conclude with some elements of his sermon:

Human thought, culture, activity, politics, social life—and even economic life with its singular preoccupation with the interests that divide and oppose the parties concerned—are all tending towards unification. Progress at once demands it and depends upon it. In it there is peace, and peace has need of it.

Now, the mystery which we are celebrating this evening is a mystery of unification, of a mystic and human unity, as we well know. And though it is unfolding itself in a sphere other than a purely temporal one, it does not prescind from nor overlook the social character of mankind. The Eucharistic mystery, which with good reason we term “communion,” presupposes, cultivates, affirms, and sublimates this social character by uniting us in an ineffable manner to Christ, and by Him to God, to our brethren, depending, however, on whether or not they participate in the table which gathers us together, in the faith which unifies our souls, and in the charity which draws us together into a single body, the Mystical Body of Christ. . . .

That which is being celebrated here is the fraternity of all the children of the Catholic Church. Here, indeed, is the very fount of Christian society; it is here that it finds those transcendent principles that make it up; this is the source of its buoyant energy that is fed not by earthly interests, which are always ambiguous, not by political calculations that are ever ephemeral, not by imperialist ambitions nor by levelings forcibly imposed, nor even by the noble and ideal dream of universal concord which man can at most formulate, but which he is unable to realize or maintain. It is nourished, rather, by a superior and divine current, by the current of charity that urges us on, that charity which Christ obtained for us from God which he infuses in us to help us to “be one” as he himself is one with his Father.

My brethren and my children, the time would not suffice for us to describe the fullness of this moment, and mere words are inadequate: here we have the celebration of the one and of the many; here we find the school of the higher love of individuals for others, the profession of mutual esteem, of engagement in fraternal co-operation and gratuitous service, the motivation for a wise tolerance; here we discover the precept of mutual forgiveness, the source of joy for the good fortune of others and of sorrow for the misfortune of others, the inspiration of preferring to give rather than to receive, the source of true friendship, the art of governing by serving and of cheerful obedience, the formation of sincere and courteous relations among men, the respect and veneration of the human person, the harmony of free and docile minds, the communion of souls—in a word, charity.⁵⁵

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⁵⁵ Paul VI, “Sermon for Holy Thursday 1964,” English translation in Bernard Lemming, *The Vatican Council and Christian Unity: A Commentary on the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council, Together With a Translation of the Text* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 277–78.